

Women in Limbo

**The Dichotomy of Nationalism and Modernity in the Image of the
Bengali Woman**

Anika Mariam Ahmed

Student ID: 09203022

Department of English and Humanities

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BRAC University
66, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka 1212

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by

Anika Mariam Ahmed

Student ID: 09203022

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Dedication

To all women regardless of borders, race and language who have defied conventions and have tried in their own way to make the rest of us who live in limbo braver and stronger.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Introduction	1
Chapters:	
1. Nationalism and Tagore's Women: The Emerging New Woman in the Emerging New Nation	6
2. Of Goddesses and Forgotten Women: A Comparative Study of Nationalism in Bankim Chatterji and Rabindranath Tagore	27
Epilogue: Emblematising Women at the Birth of Bangladesh	49
Bibliography	62

Abstract

Nationalism is commonly interpreted as loyalty to the nation. In Bengal, one of the earliest manifestations of this phenomenon can be traced to the *swadeshi* or nationalist movement. Modernity, however, which was one of the pillars of the nation's advent into nationalism, was often associated with European, and thereby unpatriotic, ways creating a paradoxical situation for people involved in anti-colonial struggles.

This dissertation attempts to find the voice of the Bengali woman as she is stuck in an uncertain space - in limbo - between nationalism and modernity, between the home and the world. Her struggle is not the same as that of her fellow man who may also oscillate between the two, but is unique to her female experience in that she is made the emblem of culture and tradition and attempts at being modern on her part is somehow seen as a betrayal. The dissertation discusses why and how women are seen as more, or less, than individuals in the emerging nation, and tries to locate her actual place in the new country, beyond symbols and ideology. This thesis particularly looks at the female characters of two of the greatest writers Bengal has ever produced, Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Rabindranath Tagore.

The dissertation concludes with a discussion on the place of women during the emergence of the newest nation that emerged in Bengal, Bangladesh. *Biranganas* or women raped during the Liberation War in 1971 get reduced to symbols while their place in the new country remains as shaky and unsure. Women's lives are once again controlled by ideologies and forces beyond themselves, and the limbo does not end. This discussion is primarily based on Shaheen Akhtar's novel *Talaash*.

"I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of nations. What is the Nation?"

Rabindranath Tagore (*Nationalism* 73)

Introduction

*A good woman, a very good woman
Is she who maintains the culture
of the mother-country...
At the crack of dawn when the cock crows,
(She) must bathe and wash her saree clean;
Must go to school every day
She who has good habits and
also reads books - she is (A good woman,
a very good woman)
While helping mother
Must learn to cook;
Must light the oven and
sweep and clean 'bending the waist';
Must follow every day
the wise counsel of father:
One who combines Timidity, bashfulness,
implicit acceptance and
physical sensibility –
She is (A good woman, a very good woman...)¹*

The figure of woman often acts as a sign in discursive formations, standing for concepts or entities that have little to do with women in actuality.²

All of us are familiar with the concept of a “good woman”, though the exact details of what that idea means may vary. It is distinct from the idea of a “good man”, and includes “womanly virtues as chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience and the labors of love” (P. Chatterjee, “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India” 629) among others. I have often wondered where these notions have come from, and how they continue to be followed like

¹ Lakshmi, C.S., “Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation”. *Economic and Political Weekly* 32.46 (Nov. 15-21, 1997): 2953.

² Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994): 68.

revelations from some holy book. Growing up in Bangladesh, I have also wondered how the simplest “values” vary so much according to sex- smoking in public for instance, or wearing anything “foreign” and even how much English one speaks. Does the problem lie in the way we define each gender, and the separate actions and behaviour we set for males and females?

Kate Millett sees the relationship between the sexes in a political light, terming it “sexual politics” (*Sexual Politics* 23). She refers to *The American Heritage Dictionary* to define the term “politics”: “methods or tactics involved in managing a state or government”, and suggests that the system of patriarchy functions by similarly managing females (23-24). One way in which this politics works is through ideological conditioning, both of males and females. Both sexes are conditioned to accept the ideology which assigns specific characteristics, roles and status to each according to the needs of the more powerful group i.e., males. This is “dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, “virtue”, and ineffectuality in the female.” Millett notes:

In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male. (26)

In our part of the world, the upholding of culture and tradition is another of those sex roles assigned to women, and the traditional woman becomes an idealized woman. This concept gathers more conviction under nationalism, when culture becomes one of the main tools with which to defend national identity. What being traditional and on the other hand “modern” essentially means is of course decided by the group which Partha Chatterjee calls the “nationalist elite” (*The Nation and its Fragments* 35). Thus a new set of dos and don’ts get imposed on women, and “sexual politics” takes a new face.

In this dissertation, I will show how women, “as carriers of authentic cultural or national identity” (Lakshmi 2953) are further inhibited from being free individuals under nationalism. I will be speaking along the lines of C. S. Lakshmi when she says:

“A notion of a defined, unalterable, definite essence operates strongly in constructing women’s lives and in women constructing themselves. Attempts are made to write this notion of unbroken tradition on the body of the woman so as to perceive women as carriers of authentic cultural or national identity and guarantors of its purity” (2953).

I will discuss how the ideology of nationalism does not recognize individual voices of women and their place in the new nation. As Partha Chatterjee has said, the woman often becomes nothing more than a symbol or an emblem (*The Nation and its Fragments* 68). Her person gets lost somewhere between trying to acquire the qualities that men, and other women, feel she must have and in shedding those they think she must not have. She is the mother, goddess, chastity, tradition and even the nation, and she is never too far from being enshrouded in a new ideal or image according to the whims and needs of a people. My focus will primarily be on the anti-colonial struggles of India and how the woman emerges as a national emblem at the time. The two authors I will be mainly looking at are Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Rabindranath Tagore, two figures whose contributions to nationalist politics in this part of the world are unmatched.

For my first chapter, I will be looking at two novels by Rabindranath Tagore to discuss why it is so important to nationalist ideology for women to remain true to tradition. Rabindranath Tagore is commonly regarded as the best writer that Bengal has produced. He is also inseparable with the anti-colonial movements of India, and is the composer of the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh. How I have grown up perceiving my country is largely associated with the national anthem I sang every day early in the morning at the school assembly, and therefore Tagore has always been an integral part

of my idea of my country which is why I choose to first study him before anyone else. The two novels I will be looking at are *Ghare Baire* (1916) and *Shesher Kabita* (1929). The translations I will be looking at are *Home and the World* (2005) translated by Sreejata Guha and *Farewell Song* (2011) translated by Radha Chakravarty, respectively.

Home and the World is the best place to look at the opposing forces between tradition and “modernization” and how women get pulled into this conflict. Bimala, the main character of the novel is the chief emblem of this conflict, and the story of her struggle is relevant even today decades after the British have quit India and even though women are much more out in the “world” than Bimala was. The novel shows how a woman becomes a symbol or an emblem for the emerging new nation and loses her individuality and voice amidst this. *The Home and the World* is also crucial to my paper because in the equal voices given to the three main characters, one sees the anti-colonial movement from three separate angles, and the nation in three different lights. I have chosen *Farewell Song* because the leading female character Labanya is Tagore’s idealized woman. Labanya is a “modern” girl, and is juxtaposed against two women who are yet more modern, even perhaps “too modern”. I want to explore whether Tagore’s ideals are liberating or constricting for the woman of “the world”.

In the second chapter, I will be looking at Bankim Chandra Chatterji and his novel *Anandamath* (1882), translated by Basanta Koomar Roy (1992). *Anandamath* has the spirit of zealous nationalism, and spurred an entire nation to an intense nationalistic struggle. It also introduced the image of Mother Nation for the first time and used the concept of the deified woman to inspire an entire people. By placing *Anandamath* in the second chapter, I will be performing a retrospective action, in order to trace back and see how the nation first came to be visualized as the Mother and thus how the woman began to symbolize tradition. Again, *Anandamath* provides the best example of this, as Bankim Chatterji is the man who created the song “Bande Mataram” and thereby formed the nationalist imagination of an

entire people. I will look at the nationalist ideology of Bankim in comparison to that of Tagore, and try to locate the voice of women in both.

Finally, in the epilogue I would look at a book about the Liberation War of Bangladesh to see how women, particularly women raped during the war, emblemize the nation once again. Their very uncertain place in the new nation remains an apt symbol of their national position. The novel is Shaheen Akhtar's *Talaash* (2004), translated by Ella Dutta as *The Search* (2011).

The thesis tries to find the place of women in the new nation, and explores what makes it so problematic. What has made the woman's position in the emerging nation so insecure and vulnerable? What are the ideologies that lie behind deifying yet shackling her? And how much have things changed for her over the passage of a century, if at all? The novels that the thesis examines deal with these questions, and I hope will give the reader a better idea of the position of women in Bengal/ Bangladesh.

Chapter I

Nationalism and Tagore's Women

The Emerging New Woman in the Emerging New Nation

*"But it is pertinent to note that the nationalist leaders benefited the most from the manipulations of representations of women. The benefits to women of participation in the nationalist movement by contrast, were always limited by their responsibilities for 'women's work' in the home."*³

*"I am frightened at an abstraction which is ready to ignore living reality."*⁴

If the first half of the nineteenth century saw the penetration of Western ideas and the onset of 'modernization', the second half of the century saw the rise of the new politics of nationalism, which was a celebration of India's past and all that was associated with its traditions and culture (P. Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 234). There were strong emotions against the British rule and an imitation of 'their' ways was deemed unpatriotic and scorned. According to Partha Chatterjee,

...all attempts to change customs and life-styles began to be seen as the aping of western manners and thereby regarded with suspicion. Consequently, nationalism fostered a distinctly conservative attitude towards social beliefs and practices. The movement towards

³ Thapar, Suruchi. "Women as Activists; Women as Symbols: A Study of the Indian Nationalist Movement". *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer 1993): 88.

⁴ Rabindranath Tagore qtd. in. *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*. Dutta, Krishna and Andrew Robinson. (New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2009): 146.

modernization was stalled by nationalist politics. ("The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 234)

In fact, the idea of nationalism itself is vague, as is the idea of the nation which is often referred to as an "imagined community" (Aikant 52). In his essay "Reading Tagore: Seductions and Perils of Nationalism", Satish C. Aikant talks about how the idea of the nation is a sociopolitical construction which is based on "either a unifying cultural signifier or an overarching ideology" (52). Empirical studies have shown how the concept of nationalism is constructed by those who can reap benefits from it, the elite and the aspiring middle-class, while the rest of society are conditioned into it. Partha Chatterjee feels that "if one only scrapes away the gloss" it becomes very difficult to defend many of the ideas propelled by nationalism ("The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 234) while Rabindranath Tagore rejected nationalism as "the organized self-interest of a people" which is "least human and least spiritual" (Aikant 52).

Ashis Nandy clearly states that "Nationalism is not patriotism" ("Nationalism, Genuine and Spurious: Mourning Two Early Post-Nationalist Strains" 3500) and goes on to differentiate between the two words which are often used interchangeably. The essential difference is that patriotism is not an ideology, but a "sentiment" (3502) whereas nationalism is. According to Nandy, the nationalist ideology often involves a deep hatred for anyone who belongs outside the nation that has been defined, and is a more egocentric "love of one's own kind" (3502). Patriotism however acknowledges the "existence of communities other than the country and gives them due recognition, sometimes even priority" (3502). It does not make demands on the individual and anyone can contribute as much to the nation as one is willing to whereas, nationalism, being an ideology, makes specific demands on the individual. It also claims foremost importance of national identity over other identities like religion, language and

ethnicities, and even fears them as “potential rivals and subversive presences” (3502). Here Nandy comments on Tagore’s interpretation of the two words:

... in his Bengali writings, Tagore used something like 12 to 15 expressions to denote one's love for one's country-ranging from 'deshabhimān' and 'swadeshprema' to 'deshbhakti' and 'swadeshchetana'. But he used none of them as a synonym or translation of the word "nationalism". When he meant nationalism he used the English word "nationalism" in Bengali script to distinguish it from the first set of words. Tagore was a patriot but not a nationalist. He thought there was nothing in common between the territoriality associated with the various vernacular concepts of patriotism and the new idea of territoriality grounded in the idea of nation state and ideology of nationalism. I suspect that he thought the former to be tied to the idea of home and the latter to be an artificial concoction that looked instrumentally at the former and, indeed, was often built on the ruins of the former. (3500)

Rabindranath Tagore had stated that “the idea of the Nation is one of the most powerful anaesthetics that man has invented” (Patrick Hogan, “Historical Economies of Race and Gender in Bengal: Ray and Tagore on *The Home and the World* 31). Tagore blames men, as opposed to Man, for “building up vast and monstrous organizations” such as the very nation that this paper is concerned with, through which the man wields his power over the woman (Kaiser Haq, “The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore” 36). For Tagore, it is this male repression which has so far prevented the woman from reaching her full potential. According to Haq,

Tagore sees evolution as a process of refinement, of ascent from the material through the animal towards the spiritual...and thinks that just as homo sapiens has superseded bigger and physically stronger species, within this species a similar supercession will place women ahead of men. (Haq, 36)

This leads back to my thesis, which is to locate the woman's voice amidst the impositions of these seemingly conflicting ideals of nationalism and modernization (because the new nationalist and progressive ideas had themselves been "imported from Europe" (P. Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 234). The "nationalist resolution of the women's question", according to Chatterjee, had been based on a division of the domain of culture into two halves- the material and the spiritual ("The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 233). Because the Western civilization clearly dominated the material sphere in terms of "science, technology, rational forms of economic organization, modern states of statecraft," this gave the European countries power over the non-European subjects and to exert their power over the colonized people (P. Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 237). In order to overcome this subjugation, the colonized people took it upon themselves to learn the ways of this material world and to mould it into their own cultures. This posed a threat to the spirit of nationalism and Chatterjee iterates this as follows:

But this could not mean the imitation of the West in every aspect of life, for then the very distinction between the West and the East would vanish- the self-identity of national culture would itself be threatened. In fact, as Indian nationalists in the late nineteenth century argued, not only was it not desirable to imitate the West in anything other than the material aspects of life, it was not even necessary to do so, because in the spiritual domain the East was superior to the West. ("The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 237)

It then became necessary to protect that sphere which the oppressor was yet unable to conquer- the spiritual sphere. The dichotomy between material/spiritual becomes analogous to a binary which is perhaps more powerful- that between the outer and the inner world, *ghar* and *bahir*, home and the world ("The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 238). And while the outside was typically the sphere dominated by the male, the woman becomes a representation of the inner world which must

be protected from the influences of the material world. And for Chatterjee, this is how we get “an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into ghar and bahir” (“The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question” 239).

The woman during the period of nationalism in colonial India then becomes an emblem of the culture and traditions that must be protected. On her begins to rest the responsibility of ensuring that “our” side of the world at least does not change while men go ahead to try and conquer the “other”, and her individual status gives way to becoming a representative of an ideology. In Rabindranath Tagore’s novel, *Home and the World*, the obsession with the ideology of motherhood is a constant driving force for Sandip and his *swadeshi* movement, and he needs it like a drug. When he praises Bimala and defines her, he does not seem to be talking about her as an individual but as an ideal. He hardly knows her and yet he sums her up in their first meeting, because in her he wants to see that image of the woman that would help propel the *swadeshi* movement forward. To Sandip, Bimala becomes a goddess, a myth and an illusion, and this is what he and his men need like an intoxicant. Sandip says the following to Bimala in their first meeting:

I can clearly see that you are the beautiful goddess of that fire which reduces the home to ashes and burns down the world; today you must give us that unconquerable strength to destroy ourselves, and you must adorn our transgression. (Tagore, *Home and the World* 687)

Tagore seems to speak through Nikhil when he mocks *swadeshi*’s glorification of the woman, and Peter Hogan quotes it in his article:

They ‘care for... an abstract image of the country,’ and not the particular individuals who compose that country. ‘The country as the Mother Goddess,’ not as the masses. ‘Worship the Mother, work for Her, dedicate your life to her sorrows,’ he mocks. (Hogan 35)

The rising importance of this symbolism leads also to a rising importance attributed to the traditional role of the woman, that of motherhood. And the ideology of motherhood, the 'bande matarem' ('Hail motherland') becomes crucial to the nationalist movement. In *Home and the World*, in response to Bimala's comments, Sandip shouts "Bande Matarem" and Nikhil echoes Tagore's views on nationalism and rejects the hypnotic mantra, "which does not awaken and liberate, but further dulls and enslaves" (Hogan 33). This then served to politicize the spheres of religion, culture and aesthetics (Bagchi 65), and Jasodhara Bagchi feels that the creation of this ideal, this myth, of the woman served to limit her space in the world. She says as follows about the ideological aspect of motherhood:

...it has served the purpose of taking away real power from women and creating a myth about her strength and power. The glorification of motherhood in colonial Bengal was merely in the domain of ideology. Such an ideology was based on a philosophy of deprivation for women in the world of practice. (65)

And the Bengali mother thus becomes a sign to 'mark a colonial Bengali man as distinct from the alien rulers', and the woman remains as the guardian protecting the home. Consequently, the slightest deviations from tradition and conventions on her part were not easily overlooked and she remained under the scrutiny of the sharp, fixed gaze of society. And so the world stares in shock as Bimala defies conventions and wears foreign jackets and leaves the inner chambers, regardless of how 'modern' Nikhil may be in his lifestyle or education. And Kitty (in *Farewell Song*) would raise an eyebrow when she lights up that cigarette while Sandip could go on smoking foreign brands, looking fashionable and suave.

Tagore clearly differentiates between "patriotism" and "nationalism" through the juxtaposition of the emotions that Sandip and Nikhil express towards India. Sandip labours to arouse the people of India to believe in an idea of the nation that may not always be in the best interest of the people who make up the very nation that he is fighting for. Nikhil on the other hand is an advocate of what Peter Hogan terms

"constructive" nationalism as opposed to Sandip's "destructive" one (24). Rather than simply trying to drive out British businessmen, patriotic individuals like Nikhil tried to non-forcibly replace foreign goods for local ones, but sadly, just like Nikhil's initiatives, most of these were failures as well. In fact, Tagore himself ventured on a match and weaving business with his elder brother Jyotindranath, which too was a failure. Indeed, the constructive nationalist movement was "advocated by the 'Tagore group,' which urged 'self-help and autonomous development ignoring British rule'" (Hogan 25). Aikant feels that Tagore was a precursor of Gandhi in bringing forth the ideal of non-violence on the Indian political stage and his novel *Home and the World* in particular celebrated this through the protagonist Nikhil, "well before Gandhi embarked on his *satyagraha* movement, with non-violent non-cooperation as the main strategy to withstand the imperial might (58). According to Ashis Nandy,

Nationalism is an ideology and is configured in human personality the way other ideologies are. It rode piggyback into the Afro-Asian world in colonial times as an adjunct of the concept of nation state. Patriotism is a non-specific sentiment centring on a form of territoriality that humans share with a number of other species. This unacknowledged difference is central to the spirited critique of conventional nationalism by Mohandas Gandhi, India's Father of the Nation, and the total rejection of nationalism by Rabindranath Tagore, India's national poet. (3500)

The inner chambers or the *antahpur* become a central element in the dichotomy between home and outside that Partha Chatterjee particularly talks about, and it is an important motif in Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World*. Bimala like other upper-class married Hindu women always remains in purdah and within the inner chambers, and even her 'modern', Western-educated husband Nikhil initially fails to convince her to come out to the world outside. As Patrick Hogan points out, to be "modern" was to "oppose the observance of the purdah" (36) and Bimala does not want to appear to be

in any way untraditional or too modern in her in-laws' home. Initially after her marriage, it was more for the sake of Nikhil's grandmother rather than anything else that Bimala maintained the *purdah*. She says,

I never really liked these discussions, but that wasn't the reason why I stayed indoors at the time. My grandmother-in-law was alive then... If a daughter-in-law of this aristocratic household renounced her *purdah* and chose to come out, she'd have accepted that too. She knew for a fact that this was bound to happen one day. But I felt, it wasn't so important that she should have to undergo the pain of it. (Tagore, *Home and the World* 676)

Like the *purdah*, the adaptation or rejection of British ways too became a strong indicator of the woman's loyalty to the nation. In *Farewell Song*, Katy Mitter and Sissy are juxtaposed against the more traditional Labanya, who even though adept in the English language and a fan of John Donne, does not give in to Western ways as the former do. More than any other qualities, the lack of tradition in the two women are highlighted and more than in any other aspect, it is in this regard that Labanya seems to be completely different from them. Katy Mitter is described by Tagore as follows:

Katy Mitter's real name was Ketaki. Her deportment was refined, thrice-distilled in her own elder brother's etiquette factory; it contained the pungent essence of British aristocracy. She had arrogantly scissored the ordinary Bengali woman's pride in her long tresses, shedding her hair-knot like a tadpole's tail, with the new convert's eagerness to imitate...And when she smoked a cigarette, holding it between two fingers embellished with well-polished nails, it was more for decorative effect than from a desire to inhale the smoke. (Tagore, *Farewell Song* 1023)

Thus developed a range of criteria based on which the woman and her "femininity" could be judged so that even if she left home, the "inner chambers" would not be threatened. As Partha Chatterjee says, "the spiritual signs of her femininity were now clearly marked- in her dress, her eating habits, her social

demeanor, her religiosity" ("Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India" 629). Thus Katy's clicking heels get noticed when she first comes to visit Labanya in Yogomaya's house (Tagore, *Farewell Song* 1025), as does Sissy's unbearably loud laughter (Tagore, *Farewell Song* 1026).

This revised criteria meant that women's attire underwent dramatic changes. The *bhadramahila* now wore petticoat and blouse along with the sari (P. Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India" 629). Because men now had to be out in the "material world", their lifestyle underwent many changes. Women thereby ended up with the responsibility of maintaining those traditions that men were being unable to keep up which included dress, eating habits and religious practices. As Chatterjee says:

Each of these capitulations now had to be compensated by an assertion of spiritual purity on the part of women. They must not eat, drink or smoke in the same way as men; they must continue the observance of religious rituals which men were finding difficult to carry out; they must maintain the cohesiveness of family life and solidarity with the kin to which men could not now devote much attention. The new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility, and by associating the task of female emancipation with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate, subordination. ("Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India" 629)

It must be noted that Katy reverted back to Ketaki in order to be acceptable as a suitable wife for Amit while it is of no concern that Amit himself had "recast" his name "in the English mould...so his English friends would pronounce it 'Amit Raye'" (Tagore, *Farewell Song* 961). All this is particularly interesting because the "women's question", as Chatterjee puts it, was a very important topic in social reformation that would be debated over and over again during the early and mid-nineteenth century ("The

Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 233). Issues like *satidaha*, widow remarriage, age of consent of marriage and other marital laws were brought to the forefront and voices were raised against practices that were considered unjust to women. Chatterjee however questions "the sudden disappearance of such issues from the agenda of public debate towards the close of the century" and wonders why "the questions regarding the position of women in society do not arouse the same degree of passion and acrimony as they did only a few decades ago" ("The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 233). "Was this because the women's question had been resolved in a way satisfactory to most sections of opinion in Bengal?" he asks ("The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" 233).

Among women's issues which were of foremost importance at the time of the Bengal renaissance as we know it, education for women was a particularly significant topic in Bengal, particularly among Hindu Bengalis. This can be credited to the reformist sect Brahmo Samaj which sought to free women of *purdah* and make education available to them. However, for the most part, education attained by women was limited to "*zenana* education" or education that was acquired within the *antahpur*, and imparted primarily by English women. This was preferred in order to maintain *purdah* of course, which was the culture and common practice. However, Bengal began to move forward from *zenana* education as English attires began to be moulded into the Indian dress, and most significant was the use of blouses that was hitherto unknown (Hogan 27). Whereas previously the woman was clad in just a single piece of cloth that did not really cover her too well, the addition of the blouse acquired now allowed her to appear in public. But even though progressive, English education was intended to "modernize" Bengali women, Western ideas of femininity were adopted only insofar as they limited the colonized woman's position. As Patrick Hogan says,

However, as education for women became more widespread, typically western ideas of femininity began to influence and deform this education. Thus, for example, instruction in mathematics was replaced by instruction in needle-work. As Borthwick explains, 'the concept of 'femininity' in connection with a stereotyped image of physical and mental frailty was not as persistent in India as it was in the west. In India being female was defined more by role than by behavioral and personality traits... and 'Cornelia Sorabji, the first Indian woman to graduate in and practice law, was of the opinion that 'till the English Married Women's Property Act...Hindu women might be said to have greater rights than English married women'. (27)

Thus to the already existing struggle between tradition and modernity was added a new ideal to keep the woman in her place so to say, within defined margins governing behaviour and manners, which directly extracted its values from the English sense of "propriety". Malavika Karlekar clearly states that "the *bhadramahila* (gentle woman) was, in most senses, modelled on the Victorian prototype of the genteel middle class woman" ("Kadambini and the Bhadrakalok: Early Debates over Women's Education in Bengal" WS-25). And the greatest irony is that this occurs during the height of the swadeshi movement, when thinkers, leaders and reformers were all seeking to reject anything English. As Hogan says,

It was one of the greatest ironies of the swadeshi movement, the movement seeking purity in the home economy, that the thinking of its leaders was so often paralyzed and distorted by western ideologies, prominently ideologies of gender. (27)

According to Karlekar, in the 1860s there were two main groups who were divided about the kind of education that women should receive. Radical Brahmos felt that there was no need for a separate academic curriculum for girls and found no reason to limit their education while mainstream Brahmos and more educated sections of Hindus believed that the only education required for girls was that which would prepare them to be "intelligent companions for the emergent bhadralok and better mothers for

the next generation" (Karlekar WS-25). Furthermore, it was also felt that "if women were excessively liberated there was no guarantee that they would either accept the moral straitjacket imposed on them or the sexual double standards allowed for men" (Karlekar WS-25). Thus while the entire nation shouted 'Bande Mataram!' in unison, and Sandip deified Bimala and Labanya heralded a new generation of educated Bengali women, even these new "privileges" granted to women ensured that their place in the outside world remain constricted and controlled.

In her article, "Birds in a Cage", Srabashi Ghosh looks at autobiographies of women from mid-nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century to observe the changes in social life of women in this period. She notes that well after women began to pursue education, the kind of education they would receive was strictly regulated. They were considered to be less intelligent than men (WS92) and were allowed to study only those subjects which would perhaps be of some use to them in the kitchen or while raising children. Science of course was not in the syllabus. Ghosh talks about Sarala and Shanta, students of Bethune College for girls established in 1879 where students did not have the option to study science. She quotes how Shanta complained, "As long as I was a student, every year the inspector would visit the college and ask, 'How many of you want to learn mathematics?' Every year some of us used to raise our hands. But four years passed and nothing happened" (WS92). The other girl, Sarala, was determined to study physics like her brothers and wrote to the education directorate, but to no avail. However, she managed to attend evening lectures in the Science Association because her father's friend could personally arrange for it. Thus even though women's education was one of the main agendas of the nationalist social reformers, they reformed the issue so far as it did not threaten their sense of power over women.

Writers like Kaiser Haq and Mary M. Lago have commented on how Tagore had felt that the world was in such a state of conflict and unrest because it is governed by men. As mentioned above, Kaiser Haq

feels that Tagore seemed to indicate that women would supersede men just as homo sapiens had overcome other physically stronger species. In one of his lectures titled "Woman" Tagore seemed to be implying the same in his visit to the US in 1916. His stated thesis here is as follows:

...men, because they have cut themselves off from Nature, have led the world through a succession of wars, and the resulting instability is abhorrent to woman, whose nature is passive and a medium of growth, like the soil. A masculine civilization has thrust woman aside, and she has reacted with a restlessness that is inimical to her innate ability to appreciate the commonplace. The sympathy that makes her an effective home-maker is needed in the world of affairs as well, but she will not achieve her place and purpose there if she indulges in strident masculine protest and behavior. (Lago 104)

Tagore's sentiments are manifest in Bimala's journey- how she is at first effortlessly swayed by Sandip in his aggressive nationalistic stance but later how her protective, emotional side overcomes everything else and she forsakes all of Sandip's ideologies for the protective love she feels towards the young Amulya. Bimala, in *Home and the World*, is made to confront the outside world with the same tenderness with which she runs the household, and the text cannot conceive of a woman who has "masculine", aggressive characteristics. Radical feminists like Kate Millet are likely to disagree with this, and would find the very generalizations that Tagore makes about the two sexes faulty. Sex is of course different from gender, the former being the biological differences in reproductive organs that differentiate men and women, and the latter being the social nurturing that results in masculine and feminine behaviour according to what is socially acceptable and conventionally expected. Tagore however feels that there are essential differences between men and women, an idea that radical feminists also adhere to, but from very different perspectives. It is difficult to criticize Tagore because he seems to think that women are in fact superior to men. He urges men to adopt the qualities of women

which he considers to be superior. The sentimental, emotional aspects seem to be natural in women, but most men must learn to acquire these qualities. In *Home and the World*, men like Nikhil and his teacher appear as exceptions, and these are men whom Tagore holds in the highest regards. Nikhil mourns the coercion that he finds deeply ingrained within him at the end of the novel, and says:

Bimala could have been someone else, but my pressure suppressed her effervescence and forced her to remain at the bottom- the harsh cement of life tore away at her person... the ones who matched with stubborn idealists like us, harmonized with us, and the ones who didn't cheated us. We corrupt the innocent. In creating a partner we destroy the woman. (Tagore, *Home and the World* 796)

Here I would like to put forth the story of Kadambini, the first Indian woman doctor. Kadambini studied medicine when the debate over women's education was at its climax, and mainstream traditional Hindus were adamant about protecting what they felt was the "right" education for women. In 1882, she along with Chandramukhi Basu became the first women to graduate from Calcutta University (note that *Home and the World* and *Farewell Song* were published in 1916 and 1928 respectively). Kadambini married Dwarakanath Ganguly, a radical social reformer who was active in trying to ensure the same education for both sexes, and by the late 1900s she had established her own private practice and her patients even included women of the Nepalese royal family. In that conservative society still dominated by the *purdah*, there was nevertheless a need for professional help for childbearing women, and Kadambini, the only female doctor, began to be much in demand. Even amidst her busy professional life, Kadambini managed to look after her household and supervised the cooking of meals "which included a special menu for her husband's older sister" (Karlekar WS-26). However, she began to be seen as an increasing threat to the women from "respectable homes". Karlekar puts it as follows:

Claiming no concessions for her sex, she had succeeded in a number of examinations where she competed equally with men. Her achievements questioned the prevalent belief that women should not be exposed to the rigours of Science and Mathematics. Further, her participation in incipient nationalist politics, the preserve of both Hindu and Brahmo men, was a source of further concern. Fearing that, among other things, women from their homes may seek to emulate her, a section of conservative Hindu opinion launched a slander campaign against Kadambini. (WS-26)

Kadambini's mobility outside the home "threatened traditional notions of chastity and femininity" and it weakened the grip of the society on women's behaviour, sexual and otherwise. In such a society, women could not challenge stereotypes if they wanted to be socially acceptable.

The rage expressed towards Kadambini was no slight or private matter. So much so that in 1891, *Bangabasi*, a journal of the Hindu orthodoxy, accused her of being a typical "modern Brahmo woman" who was thereby loathsome and offensive. By then Kadambini had five children and was a "good housewife" and even then the author "accused her of being a whore" (Karlekar WS-26). Karlekar feels that by calling Kadambini a whore, *Bangabasi* "was externalizing the male fear of a competitive and competent woman" (WS-27). The different education for women that the bulk of the population were advocating for stressed on fostering the creative and nurturing aspects of women which were thought to be essential skills for her future roles of wife and mother. The academic reforms for women then brought in the fear of the independent woman and along with it the fear of an unstable society. The Review of Education for 1866 noted that this period of transition implies "the loosening of social ties, the upheaval of customary ways" and "prolonged and severe domestic embarrassment" and it feared the "harassing times" when "the women of the country begin to be educated and learnt in-dependence" (Karlekar WS-28).

Drawing from the time and place that Tagore's novels took birth in, it is not surprising then that Amit Rai is a barrister while Labanya, even though very much the modern, educated woman, settles to be a home tutor to her cousins. That Tagore clearly advocated the same education for both sexes is clear however in how Labanya and her suitor and father's tutor Shobhanlal compete equally for the MA examinations where Labanya in fact comes through with a better score than him. It is equally manifest in the way that Labanya is brought up by her father Abanish Dutta, and it is narrated as follows:

Learning, the father's only passion, had found complete vicarious fulfillment through his daughter...He believed that a mind honed in the pursuit of learning was like an impermeable slab of concrete through which the gases of frivolous emotions could never penetrate from below...He had imagined that, if Labanya did not marry, she could remain forever wedded to learning. (Tagore, *Farewell Song* 976)

Labanya comes across as Tagore's idealized woman and through the way she has been raised and her independent nature, Tagore seems to say that it is okay for a woman to reject the traditional roles of wife and mother, although Labanya does end up marrying in the end, and seems to settle into a marriage with Shobhanlal. And even though Labanya makes a safer choice in marrying him than the more passionate and intense Amit, it is still *her* choice. Amit and Labanya converse as equals, and no one surpasses the other in knowledge and wit. Labanya however appears wiser and more sensible than Amit. It is clear then that Tagore did not doubt for once the mental capabilities of women, and their rights to the same education as men.

Interestingly, during this time there also rose a demand for educated women. Western education meant that the *bhadralok* (gentleman) now expected something more from their wives. He wanted her to have at least a certain level of education so she could be a more suitable companion. An article called "Strishiksha" ("Women's Education") in a journal of the 1870s stated that "soon it will be difficult to get

bridegrooms for girls of upper and middle class Hindu families unless these girls are given some education" (Karlekar WS-28). Thus families of educated boys began to look for prospective brides who were more than just literate and daughters also began to be groomed to meet the new demand. There was also the growing belief that a marriage between an educated man and an illiterate woman "cannot be a happy one; discord and disagreement will naturally be the result of such a marriage" (Karlekar WS-28). Likewise, Bimala is being educated in the *zenana* by the English governess according to the wishes of her husband Nikhil and Labanya makes an ideal companion for Amit Rai because of her educated and enlightened mind and her interest in subjects like John Donne's poetry. Bimala speaks of her husband's wishes for his wife to be educated as follows:

...he dared to transgress the bounds of conformity. So, when he appointed Miss Gilby as my companion and tutor, tongues started wagging at home and outside, and yet, my husband's will won in the end. (Tagore, *Home and the World* 670)

It is relevant to note here that among the many justifications provided by the British for their rule in India was the "civilizing mission" (P. Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women" 622) or the "white man's burden", as Rudyard Kipling wrote in 1899. The people of India were projected as people who had not been touched by "civilization" and were still in their "degenerate and barbaric" state (P. Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women" 622). One way in which this idea was buttressed was by showing the injustice on women brought about by Indian traditional patriarchy. "By assuming a position of sympathy with the unfree and oppressed womanhood of India, the colonial mind was able to transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country," says Chatterjee ("Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women" 622). Nationalist leaders were on the defensive. They felt that

they must alter social norms and customs in order to answer back, and allowing education for women was among those changes. As Chatterjee says:

The nationalist response was to construct a reformed tradition and defend it on the grounds of modernity. In the process, it created the image of a new woman who was superior to Western women, traditional Indian women and lowclass women. This new patriarchy invested women with the dubious honor of representing a distinctively modern national culture. ("Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women" 622).

Also, as Suruchi Thapar points out, nationalist leaders also began to feel that the spiritual/inner world needed to be adjusted to maintain some kind of consistency with the world outside (82). Thus the women at home needed to be adjusted to suit the men in the world outside. Furthermore, education was needed to teach a woman the additional qualities of "cleanliness, companionship, discipline and self-control", to make her more adept in her role in the family (Thapar 82). However, the guardian of the home becoming too modern remained a foreboding concept even while it began to be felt that a woman who was too traditional was unfitting for the increasingly modern and westernized man. Thus a certain degree of education and "training" was becoming the prerequisite for the prospective bride.

Increasingly, the woman got caught trying to maintain the perfect balance between education and a career (as for women like Kadambini) and a respectable married life and even their reputation. Many educated women themselves felt the need for "controlled education" for women and Priyambada Bagchi, a graduate from the University of Calcutta in 1892, wrote in *Antahpur* (The Home), a journal for women, "on the need for women's education to be more feminine in orientation" (Karlekar WS-28). Radharani Lahiri, who was involved with progressive Brahmo attempts promoting education for girls herself felt that no matter what she learnt, for a woman "housework is the most important" (WS-28). But then of course there were those women who challenged conventional gender stereotypes and roles.

In her article, Srabashi Ghosh talks about Rasasundari, the first Bengali autobiographer, who "found it humiliating that even after all the household chores were attended to, women were expected to stand by the head of the family to serve and please him "as if women cannot have anything better to do!" (93). Rasasundari felt like she was a "caged bird" (Ghosh 93).

Women thereby find themselves prisoners in their own homes, helplessly caught between the outer and the inner spheres. Mary M. Lago feels that Tagore was not unaware of this and portrayed it in his characters. According to her, he "knew that both he and his fictional characters had come up against the central dilemma in women's liberation, still unsolved: how is she to find sufficient energy and hours in the day to be both the angel in the house and the humanizing influence in the world at large" (106). I however do not feel that Tagore is uncertain of a solution to the woman's struggle between the home and outside and cannot agree with Lago on this. Tagore puts forth women's struggle under nationalism regarding the home/outside dichotomy beautifully, particularly through Bimala, but I do not think that he questions or wonders how the woman can manage the two worlds. Bimala inspires and sponsors the entire *swadeshi* movement and sponsors it even while she looks after household chores and looks over her husband while he has his meals. Labanya is a very liberated woman and she lives her life on her own terms- she chooses to cut off ties with her father, chooses her own partner and what she wants to do with her life. And she does seem to have "sufficient energy and hours in the day" to carry on both the inner and the outside world successfully, and her time spent in pursuing her studies or a career does not take her away from her family or her home.

For Labanya created just over a decade after Bimala, the "world" no longer remains inside the house and in the drawing room. Labanya's marriage and education are essentially her own choice, and she wanders by herself in the hills of Shillong well beyond the *antahpur*. Even though she is unmarried, she does not live with her father and has her own job, and is very much the 'modern' woman that Tagore

puts forth as an ideal. And her qualities of course shine brighter as she is foiled against Kitty and Sissy who are just "too modern" for their own good.

In fact, a bulk of nineteenth century literature concerned itself with the "threatened Westernization of Bengali women (P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* 121). Jokes and parodies making jest of Bengali women trying to mimic the *memsahib* would gain popularity among both sexes, and people associated themselves with the moral message behind these satires. Partha Chatterjee discredits such caricatures, unconvinced that even in the most Westernized families of the time there belonged the kind of women that have been portrayed in the various art forms of the time (P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* 122). The demand for unnecessary luxuries and indifference to the general well-being of the home was typical of the Westernized woman.

Partha Chatterjee, in his essay "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India", brings up a writing by Kundamala Debi when discussing the criticism of the *memsahib* which was a popular topic at the time. Debi imparted the following advice in a women's magazine *Bamabodhini Patrika* in 1870:

If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to *memsaheb*-like behaviour. That is not becoming in a Bengali housewife. See how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant, uneducated woman. And see how if God had not appointed us to this place in the home, how unhappy a place the world would be. (629)

Women thereby learn to set those standards for themselves that conform to the norms of a society dictated by men, and they get tangled in a whole new ideology. As Kate Millett put it, "sexual politics obtains consent through the "socialization" of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics..." (26). Thus even

as the entire nation rose with renewed vigor against British rule, that same nationalist ideology only tied women further with the chief marker of the *swadeshi* movement- tradition. Tradition not only became a weapon to fight foreign rulers, but also to reaffirm the rule of men over women. The idea of tradition is equally used by Sandip to fight British monopoly in the market as well as to define and decide the idealized woman and thereby keep her in her place. Even the liberal Nikhil realizes how he had always imposed his ideas on Bimala, how her individual got lost in trying to please her husband. Even Amit Rai, who is surely more "modern" than Nikhil even, must impose his ideologies on Kitty before he can love her again. In fact she alters so much to suit the Amit's idea of the perfect woman, that she becomes "virtually unrecognizable" (Tagore, *Farewell Song* 1034). Amit begins to mould Kitty to resemble Labanya, who albeit a "modern", educated woman, was firm to her tradition and not "too modern". The level of "modernity" then becomes a crucial indicator of how acceptable she is in society, and by the men in her life. Through the relationships of Nikhil-Bimala-Sandip and Labanya-Amit-Kitty we also see how it becomes essential in deciding how perfect a partner she is capable of being. It is interesting because all this happened even as nationalists tried to reconstruct women's issues in order for them to be acceptable by "modern" Europeans. The nation gradually allowed women to be modern, but only insofar that it did not jeopardize the man-woman power relationship, and the woman's role to be quintessentially traditional.

Chapter II

Of Goddesses and Forgotten Women

A Comparative Study of Nationalism in Bankim Chatterji and Rabindranath Tagore

*Thou sole creed and wisdom art,
Thou our very mind and heart,
And the life-breath in our bodies.
Thou as strength in arms of men,
Thou as faith in hearts dost reign.
Himalaya-crested one, rivalless,
Radiant in thy spotlessness,
Thou whose fruits and waters bless,
Mother, hail!*

*Hail, thou verdant, unbeguiling,
Hail, O decked one, sweetly smiling,
Ever bearing,
Ever rearing,
Mother, hail!⁵*

It is easier to preach passionately to a country that it should adopt some vast, revolutionary ideology, and centralize and simplify and subordinate everything to a single goal or a single man or a single party. It is not difficult to call for a return to the past, to tell man to turn their backs on foreign devils, to live solely on one's resources, proud, independent, unconcerned. India has heard such voices. Tagore understood this, paid tribute to it, and resisted it.⁶

If Rabindranath Tagore has made it known particularly through *Home and the World* that he does not believe in nationalism, what then does he believe in? He was of course very vocal against the *swadeshi* movement, which was the first anti-colonial movement in Bengal to have gained the popularity that it

⁵ Chatterji, Bankim Chandra. *Anandamaath* (Asia Publishing House, 1992): 54-55

⁶ Isaiah Berlin (qtd. in Tagore, Rabindranath. *Nationalism*. Penguin Books, 2009): vii

did. It is surprising then to find out that, like many other intellectuals of his time like Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Tagore too started off as a Hindu nationalist (P. K. Datta 4). Like Bankim who envisioned India as the Hindu mother goddess which he iterated in the song "Bande Mataram", Tagore too "sought to revive the ancient glories of Hinduism to counter the authority of British rule" (P. K. Datta 4). He flung himself into the swadeshi movement and with its support aimed to cancel the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon's administration in 1905.

In fact, going through the life of Tagore in Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson's book *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*, I was amazed to find in his earlier years (1905-1907) many similarities in ideology between him and the Sandip he later creates and criticizes in *Home and the World*. In protesting against British rule and particularly against Lord Curzon's decision to partition Bengal, Tagore tried to reject everything British in order to promote what Bengal has and is. In their book, Dutta and Robinson quote Tagore's grandfather Dwarkanath speaking to Max Muller in 1846 in trying to explain how Tagore had begun to think along similar lines. Here is what Dwarkanath said:

If we begin to rate the applause of Englishmen too highly we shall come to reject much that is good in us, and adopt much that is bad from them. We shall grow ashamed to go about without socks, for instance, and cease to feel shame at the sight of their ball dresses. We shall have no hesitation in throwing overboard our manners, and cheerfully emulating their customary lack of them. Our *achkans* will be cast aside as unsatisfactory apparel, but we shall replace them on our heads with hats that are hideous. In short, consciously or unconsciously, we shall have altered our lives and trivialized them, according to whether we are clapped or not. (qtd. in Dutta and Robinson 141-142)

As a part of the swadeshi movement, Tagore conducted meetings and delivered speeches to raise the consciousness of people against British injustice. He also wrote the song "*Banglar mati Banglar jal*"

(Bengal's soil, Bengal's water) and introduced the idea of *rakhi bandhan* to symbolize the communal spirit (P. K. Datta 4). However *Banglar mati* soon gave way to communal riots even before a year had passed, as middle-class swadeshi activists coerced small businessmen and poorer sections of the society to give up cheaper foreign goods and take up expensive local goods for the sake of Mother India. Social tensions built up and the blame fell on Muslim mullas who were supposedly being controlled by the Nawab of Dhaka and the British (P. K. Datta 4). The violence and hatred within the people of the same nation, even as they were supposed to be united against a common enemy, set Tagore against the swadeshi and quickly made him its most fervent critic and opponent. He criticized how it was using its own ideals to exercise power over the powerless. Instead of uniting people against the imperial force, the swadeshi movement was creating communal divisions that were in fact making the nation more vulnerable. Tagore famously commented, "Satan cannot enter till he finds a flaw" (P. K. Datta 4).

Thereby Tagore distanced himself from the politics of *swadeshi* and flung himself wholeheartedly into "constructive" nationalism (Hogan 24), chiefly through education. His wish was to establish more institutions like his university in Shantiniketan which were independent of the government. The idea gained so much popularity in Calcutta that students came to Tagore eager to leave the government schools if he would only ask them to do so (Dutta and Robinson 145). Although radical politicians were excited by this, Tagore refused to encourage them, and he later portrayed this incident from his life in *Home and the World* in a conversation between Nikhilesh and a group of agitated youth (Dutta and Robinson 145). The youth demand explanations as to why Nikhilesh is not following the *swadeshi* movement and is still supplying foreign goods to the market. Nikhilesh and his teacher Chandranathbabu explain that individuals are more important than any ideology, and that Nikhilesh will not ban foreign goods when poor people cannot survive on expensive local ones (Tagore, *Home and the World* 735-736).. He will not disregard the sufferings of people for a mere mantra.

With this reading of the swadeshi movement in mind, I would like to turn my attention to Bankim Chatterji and elaborate on the free India, the “Mataram” that he envisioned, and the image of the motherland that inspired and energized countless others like Amulya to get involved with the swadeshi movement. Bankim wrote the famed poem “Bande Mataram” for his novel *Anandamath* in 1882. The poem celebrates the Goddess Durga as symbolizing India. The poem played a crucial role in the Indian independence movement and has been sung in Congress sessions ever since Tagore added tune to it and sung it, in around 1894 (Tanika Sarkar, “Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood” 3963). The significance of the national imagery that Bankim created in the novel is explained by Nayanika Mookherjee in her essay “Gendered Embodiments: Mapping the Body-Politic of the Raped Woman and the Nation in Bangladesh”. She says:

Nationalist emotions are evoked by linking representations of nature, space, earth and mother 'all of which had only existed as separate cultural and aesthetic constructs without any strong internal connection' (Kaviraj, 1994). Kaviraj argues that the idea of linking the land with the mother first arose in Bengali nationalism in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Anandamath* written in the mid-19th century. Chattopadhyay's clarion call of Bandemataram (Hail the Mother) became part of the nationalist struggle against British colonial rule in India stoking patriotic fervour for the mother nation, and mobilizing people to fight for their nation, to free it from its shackles and to protect this freedom. (42)

Bankim was the first novelist of Bengal and the Indian subcontinent (P. K. Datta 9). He was one of the pioneer Hindu revivalists and wrote a host of monographs “reinterpreting Hindu doctrines to prove that they held their own among, and even surpassed, all other varieties of religious and social thought” (Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* 139). He also tried to form a political model based on Hindu mythological and religious texts. As Tanika Sarkar says,

In his writings of this time he tried to reorient the location of patriotism from his earlier vision of freedom for the woman, the low caste and the peasant, and he now sought it within a disciplined regime of the Hindu sacred order, which needed to prove it had an earlier glorious history than the Muslims. (*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* 139)

In fact, Bankim also became the first Hindu nationalist to present a "powerful image of an apocalyptic war against Muslims and project it as a redemptive mission" (Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* 141) and it was exactly this kind of attitude which later spurred Tagore against this kind of nationalistic vision framed by Hindu doctrines which was spearheaded by the image of the Mother Goddess. Tagore was instead an advocate of "Truth" as he put it, and challenged and criticized rigid and authoritarian ideals and thoughts, which also made him a fervent opponent of Hindu orthodoxy. This made many question Tagore's loyalty to the nation, and people wondered whether the rich son of the prestigious Tagore family was mixing too much with the British. Tagore's anti-nationalism stance also led him into conflicts with advocates of neo-orthodoxy such as Chandranath Basu, who took from and then regenerated the ideas of Bankim himself (Datta 2). Tagore's *Gora* published in 1910 is indeed a direct attack on fundamentalist Hindu ideas, and shows it to be responsible for "oppression, social fragmentation and narrow mental horizons" (Datta 2).

Interestingly, Bankim Chatterji also had the "specifically Bengali guilt about 'loyalism', about having accommodated and colluded with foreign rule" (Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* 140). This led him to much anguish and self-criticism, particularly after the Great Revolt of 1857, when Bengali Hindus sided with the British. He was compelled to criticize Hindu values being followed in the country, yet on the other hand his equating Hindu values with nationalism limited his critique. Like Bankim, many other writers, artists and journalists also took to self-criticism and satires directed at the self post-1860s (Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* 142). It is notable that "the object of criticism was no longer the

unreformed Hindu man who exploits women, but the reformed westernized man whose very body is taken over, marked and maimed by a regimen of colonial discipline- the alien discipline exercised through clock time, office space and Western education" (Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* 143). Bankim was the most unforgiving critic of them all, as exemplified in the chapter "The Nationalist Elite" in Partha Chatterjee's *Nation and its Fragments* (see page 69-70).

And then, if the Bengali man has compromised himself so irredeemably, what remains untouched and sacred is the body of the Hindu woman, "a locus of unconquered purity" (Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* 143). The chastity of the woman then became necessary for the chastity of the nation so to say, and any changes that reformers would make to her condition had the risk of being irreversible betrayals to the motherland. According to Tanika Sarkar, "this figure of the Hindu woman produced the most complicated series of negotiations between Bankim and revivalist-nationalists, and between Bankim and reformers" (144) and while he proved to be too liberal and radical for some, there were still others for whom he posed as a conservative and traditional figure. Bankim had commented:

...while society looks upon any infringement on the part of the wives as a grievous sin, the moral restrictions on men are rather weak; the biases of the men makes them pay attention to the cause of women's upliftment so far as it suits or serves them, never a jot more. (Chattopadhyay 194)

And then he contradicted himself when he said that 'loyalty to the husband is the fundamental duties of all wives" (Chattopadhyay 194), true to which he seemed to almost deify Kalyani and her devotion to her husband in *Anandamath*. In fact, Kalyani seems to be solely characterized by her sacrificial love for her husband. She takes away her own life because of the duty her husband Mahendra must fulfill, the duty to serve Mother India. Her own life has no value in itself, not even for her role as a mother. In committing suicide she escapes her responsibility as a mother when she leaves her infant behind even

when she knows that her husband will not be looking after it. Very obviously then, the Motherland is given greater importance than the mother herself, and while the land is put on a pedestal for devotees to pay homage, the status of the actual woman in essence is ignored and forgotten. Thus society seemed to have solved women's issues with Rammohan Roy's campaign against the tradition of widow immolation and Vidyasagar's attempts to legalize widow remarriage and abolish Kulin polygamy, according to Partha Chatterjee (*The Nation and its Fragments* 116). And thus Bankim Chatterji's Kalyani, even though created well after the great changes aforementioned, continues to be heralded for idol-worshipping her husband and for taking her own life so Mahendra can fight for the great cause of liberating the nation from imperial rule. It is striking that even while his wife breathes her last, Mahendra begs her to sing the song "Bande Mataram" and the scene of her death efficiently shifts to the image of Mother India. Instead of talking of his just deceased wife, Mahendra and his friend instead burst out into the song celebrating the nation. It is not difficult to draw a parallel then to the rising popularity of the image of nation as a goddess and the dying importance of the women's question in reality. The death scene of Kalyani is as follows:

Kalyani's voice became fainter and fainter. Still she continued to sing the *Bande Mataram*. Slowly her voice failed. Then came the moment when she neither spoke nor sang. Her eyes were closed. Her body became cold. Mahendra felt that Kalyani had breathed her last. Then, like a man possessed, Mahendra repeatedly cried *Bande Mataram* loud enough to shake the forests, to frighten the wild animals in their dens, and to rend the skies. Some one then embraced him lovingly and began to chant the same song with him. Thus in the infinite forest, at the behest of the Infinite, and before the body of the dying Kalyani on her journey to the Infinite, two comrades sang from the very bottom of their hearts and from the depths of their souls. The birds and the beasts became quiet again. The forest became a fitting temple for this song of the Mother. (B. Chatterji, *Anandamath* 50)

Jasodhara Bagchi elaborates on this image of the mother in *Anandamath* in her essay "*Anandamath and The Home and the World: Positivism Reconfigured*". She says how "much of the appeal of the novel arises from the threatened order symbolized by the Devi/ Motherland...With her resplendent past, her wretched present and her radiant future, she is a trope of appeal for a rising nationalist consciousness (178)". She also feels that in many ways Tagore's *Home and the World* is a rewriting of Bankim's *Anandamath*, one of which is the contrasting way in which the woman is presented as *sahadharmini*⁷ as well as in the man-woman relationship. Bagchi beautifully relates the two novels, and sees one almost as a sequel to the other, where "the militant Hindu that Bankim had imaginatively visualized in *Anandamath* was translated into political reality by the 'extremists' of the swadeshi movement" (181). And the concept of 'Bande Mataram' which was the driving force behind the 'santans' (the Children of Mother India) in Bankim's book becomes the terrifying mantra that fuels the 'destructive swadeshi' in Tagore's novel. It is the same hypnotism that not only destroys Bimala's home but also destroys the India that belongs as much to the poor, the Muslims and women as it does to the Hindu *bhadralok*. Tagore also challenged the notion of the ideal woman that Bankim put forth through the characters of Kalyani and Shanti, which was the sophisticated Victorian ideal of womanhood comprising two faces-the wife or *sahadharmini*, and the temptress (Bagchi, "Positivism Reconfigured" 181). And I feel that by clearly demarcating the space of the two women by showing that Kalyani had always been indoors and Shanti was naturally a person of the outside world, Bankim shows that a woman can either belong indoors or outside and thereby Bimala, if she once leaves home, can never really return.

Rabindranath Tagore's overt rejection of nationalism made him unpopular in his milieu. The World War in particular made him firmer in his own stance, and during lectures in America and Japan in 1916, he argued that war and nationalism were twins (P. K. Datta 4). He expressed that nationalism was a result

⁷ Meaning "partner in *dharma*" as according to Bagchi (179). *Dharma* is a very important concept in Hindu philosophy and religion and literally means Law or Natural Law, and includes those behaviours or acts considered necessary to balance the natural order of things, and ideas like duty, vocation and religion.

of the greed and competition that was characteristic of Western industrial culture and made machines out of people, who grouped together as 'nations' in order to gather wealth and power more efficiently than the others (P. K. Datta 4). This kind of unhealthy competition leads to international discord and people forget the "universal values of truth, justice and human relationships" (P. K. Datta 4). Rabindranath proposed 'internationalism' instead, which based itself on harmonious coexistence between diversities of people. In his ideal world cultures would meet and reshape each other, although in no way does it mean that he wanted individual cultures to merge with one another and lose their individuality. India would be ideally governed just as Nikhil governed his land as landlord, where people of all religion, class and gender are given their space, including the Miss Gibbys. Nikhil then clearly evolves as Tagore's voice against the Sandips of the world who work to put nation and their own ideologies beyond people and truth and justice. In the lectures that he delivered in America and Japan in 1916 and 1917, Tagore upholds the importance of unity and cooperation above all else. He says:

Each individual has his self-love. Therefore his brute instinct leads him to fight with others in the sole pursuit of his self-interest. But has also his higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help. The people who are lacking in this higher moral power and who therefore cannot combine in fellowship with one another must perish or live in a state of degradation. Only those peoples have survived and achieved civilization who have this spirit of co-operation strong in them. So we find that from the beginning of history men had to choose between fighting one another and combining, between serving their own interest or the common interest of all. (66)

Tagore saw India as a "land with a genius for the synthesis of East and West", an idea which was seen in his writings from as early as 1878 (Dutta and Robinson 151). He talked extensively on this theme in two lectures in Calcutta in 1908, as a reaction to terrorist attacks on government officials by Bengali youth. Tagore never condoned such violence, and saw the events as taking us further away from an ideal world

of unity and harmony, of India as a melting pot of cultures from around the world. He felt there should be greater reasons for the people of India to unite than unifying in order to fight the enemy. In a lecture delivered in 25 May in Calcutta, titled "Path o patheyo", he said:

Some of us are reported to be of the opinion that it is mass animosity against the British that will unify India... So this anti-British animus, they say, must be our chief weapon... If that is true, then once the cause of the animosity is gone, in other words when the British leave this country, that artificial bond of unity will snap in a moment. Where, then, shall we find a second target for animosity? We shall not need to travel far. We shall find it here, in our country, where we shall mangle each other in mutual antagonism, athirst for each other's blood. (qtd. in Dutta and Robinson 152)

He concedes that earlier in history, this problem of trying to live together harmoniously with varieties of people was not this significant because each country was geographically smaller and communication facilities were not as advanced (Tagore, *Nationalism* 66). So it was easier for communities to live in unity, because they barely had to adjust with different peoples. And it was this spirit of comradeship and togetherness which gave rise to the greatest arts and religions and science. At the time of his speech, Tagore sees the coming together of all different races of people as the greatest challenge facing India, and there remain only two alternatives: "interminable competition or co-operation" (Tagore, *Nationalism* 66). India can either go on fighting with the British, and Hindus and Muslims can continue trying to eliminate each other, or they "can find some true basis of reconciliation and mutual help" (Tagore, *Nationalism* 66). Tagore hails those who naturally have that "moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity, who have the least feeling of enmity against aliens, and the sympathetic insight to place themselves in the position of others" (Tagore, *Nationalism* 67) and it is not difficult then to see what would make *Home and the World* in many ways a rewriting of *Anandamath* as Bagchi sees it.

Anandamath's significance in the history of India goes well beyond literature. It played a huge role on subsequent nationalist movements in Bengal and in other parts of India as well. By the end of the century, five editions of the book had already been published and the next century saw it being translated to all the major languages of India, some of which have appeared as recently as the sixties of the twenty-first century, attesting to its continuing popularity (Mukherjee 903). Meenakshi Mukherjee quotes an unnamed critic in her essay "Anandamath: A Political Myth" and says how according to him Bankim was "attempting in the wake of the new awakening in the country, a kind of idealistic romanticized regeneration of the Hindu ethos" (903). Mukherjee is doubtful however, of whether Bankim's vision of the new nation guided by a Hindu revival included the whole of India, and feels that *Anandamath* gained the kind of popularity that it did because it managed to combine a "revived Hindu religious fervour with a new found nationalistic zeal" (903). So much so that the book is said to have inspired young "santans" to carry the Bhagavat Gita along with a revolver. The "Bande Mataram" song of the novel gradually earned the status of an unofficial national anthem and motivated countless freedom fighters in the years to come, as well as linking the Hindu mother goddess with politics for the first time. All this goes to explain the kind of ideological impact that Bankim had on the emerging new nation, and how Tagore deviates from it. Mukherjee points out the aspects of the novel that promote the "enmity against aliens" that Tagore shunned:

In the five editions of the novel that appeared in his lifetime Bankim continued to make 'minor changes in the text quite often softening the adjectives applied to the British as the enemy, - or substitutions the word British (Ingrej in Bengali) by *yavana*. In the novel both the Muslims and the British are the enemies and the words *yavana* or *bidharmi* (i.e., those belonging to a different religion) can refer to either. The country has to be saved from both of them, but the author sometimes exploits the ambiguity of the words and remembers to comment on the relative superiority of the British as a race. Considering Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's official position it is

not easy to decide today how much of his admiration for the British came out of conviction, and how much out of expediency. (904)

The admiration for the West underlying fervent nationalism that Mukherjee notes is something that Tagore particularly observed. Perhaps Sandip's use of foreign cigarettes even at the height of his *swadeshi* movement was a sly mockery of that. Interestingly, it was after all Western education that really shaped the Bengali *babu* in many ways and which definitely taught him the idea of the nation, and Tagore failed to see what was wrong in taking from any culture if it benefitted people. He did not see why poor people will not buy foreign goods if they were cheaper, or even why Bimala will forsake her foreign jackets and perfumes and English songs learnt from Miss Gilby. In a letter written to a friend in 1908 which stressed that "patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter", he wrote, "I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live" (*Nationalism* xii). According to Tagore, the utter rejection of foreign influence hid a secret admiration of the West and only those who were proud enough of their own cultures could allow European influence without the fear of succumbing to it. He said:

Rammohan Roy was able to assimilate the ideals of Europe so completely because he was not overwhelmed by them; there was no poverty or weakness on his side. He had ground of his own on which he could take his stand and where he could secure his acquisitions. The true wealth of India was not hidden from him, for this he had already made his own. Consequently he had with him the touchstone by which he could test the wealth of others. (*Nationalism* vii)

Tagore did not see India, or any other country for that matter, as a nation already formed and polished which if changed in any way would deteriorate from perfection. Nations and cultures are ever-evolving and have limitless possibilities of learning and relearning from one another. In one of his essays "East and West in Greater India", he writes:

If India had been deprived of touch with the West, she would have lacked an element essential for attainment of perfection. Europe now has her lamp ablaze. We must light our torches at its wick and make a fresh start on the highway of time. That our forefathers, three thousand years ago, had finished extracting all that was of value from the universe, is not a worthy thought. We are not so unfortunate, nor the universe, so poor. (*Nationalism* xiii)

Along with Rammohan Roy who “with a wonderful breadth of heart and intellect...accepted the West without betraying the East”, Tagore also put forth the example of Maharashtrian jurist Mahadev Govind Ranade who spent his life trying to join the East and West in harmony and mutual benefit. Unlike many intellectuals of Tagore’s time, both of them had worked “to clear the way for an acceptance of whatever elements in the British are of value for the true History of India” (*Nationalism* xiii). Fervent rejection of anything foreign then symbolized for Tagore a deep-rooted sense of inferiority and maybe even a conviction of Western perceptions of the self. Tanika Sarkar feels that this was the reason why Bankim tried to portray Bengalis as being very aggressive in *Anandamath*. She says:

It is impossible to fully explain why this nation had to be founded on war. It is also difficult to be sure about why, in a colonial context, so many nationalist writings would go back to instances of Hindu triumph against medieval Muslim monarchs in the name of patriotism. There was the British stigma about effeminate Bengalis which resulted in the exclusion of Bengalis from the coveted colonial military and paramilitary apparatus. Bankim, particularly, had been anxious about Bengali non-martial qualities, since he was half persuaded by the colonial stereotyping. In his earlier novels, he returned obsessively to histories of shameful Bengali defeat and cowardice in the face of invasions: Bengali nationalists, Bankim included, had to reach out to Rajput and Maratha histories of resistance against the Mughals when they wanted to depict patriotic wars. The haunting presence of so many defeats and surrenders required a redemptive historical

counterpoint: of heroism and aggressive masculinity, to procure an honourable future. (Sarkar, "Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood" 3961)

Partha Chatterjee speaks extensively of Bankim's perception on what makes the East and the West different, where "East" generalizes everyone- Indian, Bengali, Hindu-Muslim ("Transferring a Political Theory: Early Nationalist Thought in India" 124). Bankim feels that "national-cultural values" (P. Chatterjee, "Transferring a Political Theory: Early Nationalist Thought in India" 123) have shaped the people of the East in such a way so as to make them naturally passive and unable and even unwilling to resist colonial subjugation. As Chatterjee says:

Let us begin with the question of power. Why is India a subject nation? Bankim provides two answers. The first is that Indians lack a natural desire for liberty. Some Indians probably nurse a vague feeling that independence is better than subjection, but never has this feeling become a compelling desire... The second reason for the subjection of India was the lack of solidarity in Hindu society. There is no single-minded devotion to the interests of the nation. However, argues Bankim, because of the contacts with the English, Indians were now beginning to discover the true basis of liberty and national solidarity. ("Transferring a Political Theory: Early Nationalist Thought in India" 123)

Bankim had completely taken in a Eurocentric perception of the East, and has himself projected the people of the East, and of India, as "Others" (P. Chatterjee, "Transferring a Political Theory: Early Nationalist Thought in India" 123). He feels that Europeans, by culture, are superior in the arts of warfare, power play and progress, the lack of which qualities make the East inferior to them. And Tagore says that it is this sense of inferiority that makes people so violent in their rejection of anything Western, even if they can benefit from it. In fact, the very history from which Bankim draws his arguments can be questioned to be Eurocentric knowledge, which he himself often objected to. But it seems obvious that

Bankim had already been conditioned to Western perceptions of the East and Orientalism⁸ (P. Chatterjee, "Transferring a Political Theory: Early Nationalist Thought in India" 123). Whatever is needed for progress and power, as Chatterjee puts it, must be imitated from the West because according to Bankim, what India yields is not sufficient to drive away the British.

Tanika Sarkar describes Bankim's relationship with colonial rule as being 'ambivalent' ("Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood" 3961). On one side the best period of his literary career was marked by increasing colonial domination, which was the period between the 1870s and 1880s. The tensions and bitter controversy over the Ilbert Bill⁹ begun during this time leading to colonial racism that reached unprecedented levels. Then again, on the other hand, "as Bengali middle class loyalism during the 1857 uprising had already shown, the modern intelligentsia would not comfortably identify their aspirations for freedom or their longing for a heroic war with a return to the Mughal past, and with the undoing of a modernity with which they had a complex and intimate relationship" (Sarkar, "Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood" 3961) and even during very fervent Hindu nationalist phase, Bankim would not reject what he had learnt from Western political doctrines. As Sarkar says,

So, although it is widely believed that his transference of anger from the British to the Muslims was a tactical compromise, I think he did believe in what the Great Being said to Satyananda at

⁸ "Orientalism created the Oriental; it was a body of knowledge in which the Oriental was "contained and represented by dominating frameworks" and Western power over the Orient was given the "status of scientific truth". Thus, Orientalism was "a kind of Western projection onto ardd will to govern over the Orient." (Partha Chatterjee, "Transferring a Political Theory: Early Nationalist Thought in India" 121)

⁹ The Ilbert Bill passed in 1883 introduced an amendment for existing laws in the country allowing Indian judges and magistrates the jurisdiction to try British offenders in criminal cases at the District level, something that was disallowed at the time.

the end of AM (*Anandamath*)¹⁰: The British would teach Hindus the useful sciences. Colonialism, for Bankim, was a historical necessity. (3961)

Tanika Sarkar also elaborates on the importance of the image of the new nation that Bankim led an entire people to envision. She feels that the “new imaginary” was necessary for Bankim because both the history as well as the present condition of India was not satisfactory for him to draw from. Bankim was very critical “of the politics of associations and petitions that his contemporary educated middle class politicians had formed, since he found that to be lacking in heroic masculine qualities” and besides, the 20th century “revolutionary terrorism”, which was a more military approach to nationalist politics, was yet to emerge which “reinforced the necessity of an imagined history” (“Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood” 3961). According to Sarkar,

A novel, then, had to carry the entire burden of a politics that was yet to be born. AM, therefore, was not really a representation, it was more a performance, an iteration, making something happen with words. (“Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood” 3961)

In the preface to the first edition of the novel, Bankim had written that *Anandamath* served to demonstrate that “there is a link between the heavens and this world” (Sarkar, “Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood” 3961). The nation is deified and raised beyond the natural and the mundane and “an embodied sacred presence is the dominant image, propelling the entirety of novelistic action” (Sarkar, “Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood” 3969). The land inhabited by the Santans and other villagers is hardly like the Bengal that we may be familiar with. In the opening scene of the novel, the land is described as follows:

¹⁰ My parenthesis.

Vast, very vast indeed, was the forest. Huge trees stood in endless rows. They entwined each other warmly, and danced with joyous waves in the air. Such was the thickness of the forest that even the blinding light of hot summer days was not visible on the ground. No human dared tread on these grounds. It was midnight. On all sides darkness enveloped the forest. And the darkness within was like the darkness in the womb of the earth. The birds and other creatures were all in deep sleep. A heavy silence compounded the blackness of this forest. On such a night in the midst of the forest, a human voice broke the silence by saying, 'Shall I ever attain my hearts desire?' When silence returned, no one could ever believe that he had heard a human voice in such a forest! (B. Chatterji, *Anandamath* 27)

Bankim had thereby tried to create a reality through his myth, a myth of heroic men whom he clearly found amiss in reality. Suruchi Thapar feels that the theme of femininity and motherhood (which "Bande Mataram" gave rise to) was crucial to nationalist ideology because by reinforcing what it means to be feminine, Indian men could establish their own masculinity under British gaze (88). Was Bankim perhaps highlighting the "manliness" of men by stressing on the "femininity" of women, and creating a myth of female divinity? According to Thapar, one of the justifications for colonial rulers provided by the British was Indian (especially Bengali) men's supposed "lack of masculinity" which made them incapable of self-governance. Katherine Mayo in her controversial book *Mother India* (1927) provided "inertia, helplessness, lack of initiative and originality, sterility of enthusiasm" as typical characteristics of Indian men for which India should not be allowed to be independent (Thapar 88). Thapar continues:

In this context, it was essential for the nationalist leaders to project 'femininity' in ways which would enhance the 'masculine' or worldly virtues of Indian men. The concept of 'femininity' in the 'new woman' construct which thus emerged was based on mythology, literature and history. The mythical figures of Sita and Savitri were considered the epitome of ideal Indian

womanhood. The woman was supposed to be devoted to her husband and to show reverence for elders. In addition she was supposed to be her husband's Ardhangini (complementary half) and Sahadharmini (helpmate), as well as to possess the virtues of benevolence and self-sacrifice. There was at the same time equal stress on her acquiring the practical skills of running a house and rearing children. All these virtues were considered non-threatening in the traditional male hierarchy. (88)

The song "Bande Mataram" presents the land as a tripartite goddess and this is supported by the images that Mahendra encounters in the temple. The first image evoked is that of Jagadhatri, the goddess of agriculture who made the land habitable, followed by that of Kali who represented deterioration of civilization (Sarkar, "Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood" 3965). The final and most powerful image that stays with us is that of demon-slaying Durga and she is glorious and mighty, annihilating enemies who are no match for her. According to Sarkar,

Nationalists preferred a deified nation whose land and people are mere instruments for revenge. The Hindu Right, which had stayed away from all anti-colonial movements, adored, nonetheless, this reified nation, and the worship through violence that the Santans visualised. ("Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood" 3969)

Accordingly, Bankim unhesitatingly offers people for sacrifice to the deity which is the Nation. Every life and every relationship is secondary to the Nation which is above everything else. Even though the women in the novel are often called "Mothers" and are thereby associated with the goddess herself, the women in the narrative are subservient to men. While the Mother is worshipped as a concept, women are still characterized by the sacrifices they make for their husbands. Her duty to her husband is her sacred vocation. An excerpt from the novel will exemplify this as follows:

"My husband's duties are his own," Shanti said and laughed, "Who am I to prevent him from the discharge of his duties? In this life the husband is the lord of the wife; but in the life beyond death, righteousness is the lord of us all. My husband is great indeed to me; but greater than he is my sense of duty; and greater even than that is the sense of duty of my husband. I can sacrifice my sense of duty as I like, but I can never allow myself to cause my husband to stray from his path of duty. Mahatma, that is impossible! If my husband has to die at your command, let him die. I can never, never ask him not to die" (B. Chatterji, *Anandamath* 152).

In fact, women are portrayed as potential dangers, as temptresses who would distract the Santans from their mission and break their determination. The Santans must thereby renounce their roles as husbands and fathers completely once they decide to join the order, and the slightest weakness towards "home" as symbolized by women and children is met with the strictest punishments. Importantly, women are fit to be deities but not heroes, and Mahatma says to Shanti:

"'You are certainly a saintly woman,' the Mahatma said. 'But a wife is her husband's helpmate only in household duties and not in heroic deeds. Which hero ever became a hero without the cooperation of his wife?'" (B. Chatterji, *Anandamath* 124).

Thus the most that is expected from a woman is to make her husband's service to the Nation easier by well, staying out of the way. Making it easier for her husband Mahendra to perform his duty as a Santan is reason enough to justify and even glorify Kalyani's suicide. Even though Shanti is portrayed as being of almost an opposite nature to the more "feminine" character Kalyani, the former being naturally a person of the outside world and ultimately joining the Santans, her essential role remains the same, i.e. to serve her husband. Even her duty towards the Nation seems more a duty towards her husband Jiban, as she tells him:

'I am your wife by faith,' Shanti interrupted. 'It is my religious duty to help you in the performance of your duties. You have accepted a rigorous religion. I left home only to help you in the path of your duty. I am roaming in these jungles so that you and I together may serve Mother India to the best of our ability. I want to fortify you in the discharge of your duties as a Child. As a wife in the faith, how can I stand in the way of your higher duties? (B. Chatterji, *Anandamath* 137)

Home and the World criticizes this devotion to the husband as a kind of learnt behaviour women traditionally pick up, as opposed to naturally occurring sentiments, exhibited through the Bimala-Nikhillesh relationship in particular and through Bimala's perception of herself. Her behaviour towards Nikhillesh is a kind of ideal that she sets herself to fulfill, even though Nikhillesh discourages it as far as possible. In the very opening of the novel, Bimala speaks of her mother whose loving nature made up for her dearth of physical beauty (mainly, her dark skin). This is the ideal that Bimala wants to embody. She says to herself:

"In my childhood, I have seen how the glow of bhakti turns everything beautiful. Even as a child I felt the caress in my mother's gracious, nurturing hands and the love from my mother's heart that poured out and plunged into a sublime ocean of beauty when she carefully peeled the fruits for my father and arranged his meal on a white marble plate, when she kept aside the paan for him, wrapped in fine cloth sprinkled with keora water, and as she gently fanned him and kept the flies off his plate when he sat down to eat" (Tagore, *Home and the World* 669).

And then she says how she has herself tried to follow her mother's devotional behaviour and apply it to her own marriage:

"Didn't the same strain of reverence run in me? It did. No debate, no deliberations over good and bad- it was just an inexorable strain! And entire lifetime spent playing it like a hymn in praise of the Lord Almighty in a corner of His temple... I remember, when I woke up at dawn and very cautiously, touched my husband's feet, the sindoor on my forehead seemed to shine brighter than ever. One day he woke up, laughed and asked, 'What's this, Bimal, what are you doing!' I was so embarrassed. Perhaps he felt that I sought his blessings furtively. But no, oh no, it wasn't for the blessings- it was the woman's heart, where love itself seeks to worship" (Tagore, *Home and the World* 670).

From the very beginning of the novel, Nikhilesh lightly laughs off Bimala's devotional acts and he clearly seeks a friend and an equal in his partner rather than a devotee. Bimala feels that the 'urge to revere' her husband was innate in her, something she inherited from her mother, but unfortunately for her Nikhilesh does not like this. He tries to make her understand that 'men and women have equal rights over one another and hence their love is also on an equal footing' (Tagore, *Home and the World* 671). He dotes on Bimala and respects her mind, and defies conventions to get her educated by Miss Gilby. Nikhilesh also keeps her acquainted with ideas and thoughts of the current world, and urges her to think for herself. Towards the end of the novel, Bimala denies Nikhil an embrace and falls to his feet instead, asking him to allow her to worship him. Nikhil lets her, "not because he accepts her worship, but because, as he says, he realizes that it is not he, but something beyond him, that is being honoured" (Chaudhuri 49). Supriya Chaudhari elaborates on Bimala's ideal of devotional love in her essay "A Sentimental Education: Love and Marriage in *The Home and the World*" as follows:

This ideal consists in complete devotion to one's husband, unquestioning self-surrender to the rituals of the *andarmahal*, conjugal duty seen as an act of faith, even of piety: from such custom and ceremony, Bimala feels, are innocence and beauty born. In its cultural and historical

specificity, this is the ideal of Hindu womanhood set out in the *Manusmriti*, represented here by the figure of the veiled Hindu wife with vermilion in her hair, serving her husband a plate of fruit or fanning him at mealtimes. (46)

Bimala associates this kind of devotion to a kind of graceful and dignified existence. For her, "love is identical with devotion and self-submission" and she has fully internalized the values of Hindu patriarchy which may put Mother Goddess in a pedestal, but will still essentially require women to worship their husbands (Chaudhuri 46). Shanti and Kalyani are of course perfect embodiments of that. It is notable that the intellectuals at the time of *Home and the World* glorify the same sacrificial love of the woman that Bankim had exalted in his novel some thirty years back, as Bimala points out:

"The impassioned poets of today sing loud praises about the incredible beauty in a wife's chastity and a widow's celibacy. It is evident that truth and beauty have parted ways at this juncture of life. So then, can Truth be salvaged only under the guise of beauty?" (Tagore, *Home and the World* 671).

And will the woman then be continued to be praised in metaphors, in the guise of grand emblems, as Truth and Beauty part ways and her real place in the new nation is as fragmented as it ever was? While Tagore criticized this devotion towards the woman which ignores her individuality and limits her distinct personality to flourish, it is evident that he still cannot completely move away from the ideologies of Bankim that have been well internalized. Bankim's ideas have shaped the national imagination so powerfully that it is not surprising that Tagore, even when aware of it, still leaves traces of that idealized woman in the women he creates. Even though he consciously makes Labanya a very independent, "modern" woman, he cannot help making her aptly traditional. And even though Bimala challenges and defies many conventions, she must still return to her husband and accept his superiority of mind.

Epilogue

Emblematizing Women at the Birth of Bangladesh

My Golden Bengal, I love you.
 Eternally your skies and winds play their flute within my heart.
 Oh Mother, in the spring, the smell of the mango grove
 Makes one beside oneself.
 Alas I die in pleasure-
 Oh Mother, in the autumn's harvesting fields,
 I have seen your sweet smile.
 What a sight, what a shade, what gentle love, what attachment (*maya*).
 Unfolds as you spread the ends of your saree,
 under the banyan tree, beside the river.
 Mother when you speak, your words
 ring in my ears like nectar sweet.
 Alas I die in pleasure.
 Mother when your body is tarnished
 Oh mother my eyes fill to the brim.¹¹

Self-interested men are mindful of the improvement of women only to the extent that it furthers their
 self-interest; not for any other reason.¹²

Women were equated with the Mother Goddess within the anti-colonial struggles that marked the
 emergence of India as an independent nation. She was symbolized as the nation itself as a testament to

¹¹ Mookherjee, Nayanika. "Gendered Embodiments: Mapping the Body-Politic of the Raped Woman and the Nation in Bangladesh". *Feminist Review* 88, War (2008): 40-41.

¹² Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994): 135.

its age-old traditions and customs. At the birth of Bangladesh almost three decades later, the emblem accorded to woman takes a less Hindu face, and she becomes simply, “mother and sister” whose honour the freedom-fighters must fight for. Even when she is asked to join the freedom struggle, she is addressed as ‘Banglar Mayera, Banglar Meyera’.

To end this thesis, I will be looking at the novel *Talaash* (2004), translated as *The Search* (2011). It is the story of Mariam told from a few years before the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. Mariam’s life almost runs parallel to that of the emerging nation, and she becomes a *birangana*¹³ during the war, one of the many women¹⁴ raped and tortured in Pakistani military camps. The novel tells the story of a nation’s rejection of *biranganas*, the “nation’s pride” (Akhtar 206), who were unable to find their place in the new nation even as nationalists heralded them as nothing less than national heroes. The name “birangana” itself was given by the father of the nation, and the book describes him addressing the women at the rehabilitation centre saying, “You are my mothers. You are Biranganas” (Akhtar 300).

I will be concluding with Mariam’s story because the *birangana* becomes an emblem during the making of Bangladesh, when the people of the region had to “imagine the nation” (Firdous Azim, “*Talaash: A Gendered Search for the Nation*”) for a second time. The previous two chapters have focused on the birth of India, and here I will be taking a closer look home at the emergence of Bangladesh, and the associated nationalist thoughts that gave rise to more fragments than meets the eye. Mostly, I will be trying to listen to the muffled voices of the *biranganas* through a study of *The Search* and try to show how the individual women got ignored and rejected even as they were supposedly revered as emblems. Commenting on *The Search*, Firdous Azim notes as follows:

Stories of the birth of Bangladesh thus mark a victory – a victory and a resolution. But it is precisely when we bring in the women of the nation, that the easy picture starts acquiring other

¹³ “war-heroines” (Mookherjee 40)

¹⁴ “two hundred thousand women raped in a span of nine months” (Mookherjee 39)

dimensions, and make us pause and reflect about the meaning of Bangladesh. Women as it is often said 'sacrificed' their 'honour' for the country, just as their brothers gave their lives. But the stories of women who had been raped by Pakistani soldiers has proved to be the most difficult to tell, and in a way, can be seen to uphold the status not only of women in Bangladesh, but has become emblematic of the country itself.

Along *The Search*, Mariam and her brother Montu receive the highest possible national honours, Montu dying a martyr and Mariam becoming a *birangana*. However, the reception each sibling gets in the new nation is much contrasted. While Montu becomes an infallible hero, Mariam gets rejected and marginalized wherever she tries to find a place for herself- in employment, family, friendship or marriage. There is a world of difference between what the nation says she is and how she is treated by the people who comprise it. In a conversation with Suman, a friend of Mariam's former lover Abed Jahangir, Mariam says, "I hope you know the meaning of Birangana. She is the pride of the nation, the pure and chaste woman of independent Bangladesh" (Akhtar 230). Suman lashes out at her days later, saying: "Why pretend you're a decent woman? We all know what you are. Trash left behind by the army..." (282). The woman who the father of the nation calls mother, the emblem of the new nation, with whose journey the birth of the nation is inseparable, is unable to fit into the country for which she has shed no less blood than her brother. As Firdous Azim says,

Independence brings freedom, but Mary, and her raped sisters, soon discover that they pose a problem, both for their families and the newly-independent Bangladesh. No longer does Mary seek to make her way back to her village, and in the rehabilitation centre she comes across a notice in a newspaper put in by her parents seeking her brother Montu. Montu's disappearance has been recorded, but no such notice goes out for Mary. Montu's death in the war, far from being glorious, presents a picture of a hapless boy, but this hapless boy is commemorated, and

even a school named after him. But the living Mary is a problem. Eventually her father comes and takes her home from the rehabilitation centre, and here begins Mary's life in the new nation.

The Search is a search for the place of a woman in her newly liberated land. It is a question thrown at a society which shuns the very "mother" whose honour it fought for (as the Major says when drilling the freedom fighters: "Young people, have courage, be brave. One cannot free one's country without a war... The honour of your mothers and sisters is at stake") (Akhtar 93). It further casts doubt on the nation-builders who forgave by General Amnesty every man who helped in the matter of rape and oppression.

According to Firdous Azim, the search for the nation has always been "gendered", though in different ways. Mariam and the other women raped in the war are cornered and really incarcerated in the lone rehabilitation centre, from which they move to the red district areas. Mariam's family does not even look for her once the war is over although they publish lost notices for Montu daily in the newspaper. What has her reality then to do with the national honour accorded to her? The Montus, Abed Jahangirs and even the Major Ishtiaques come out of the war with not a blemish to their names, while Mariam, who fights as bloody a war, is shunned by the very nation she has helped create. This places doubts regarding the place of the woman in the new nation where the emblem of the nation, the "mother" herself is shattered and unsure of her position and identity. The novel recalls how the new born infants of the *biranganas* were snatched away from the mothers regardless of their consent, and how many of the women wanted to go to Pakistan with the retreating army because it was impossible for them to find a home in Bangladesh. Nilima Ibrahim, in her collection of interviews with *biranganas*, mentions being shocked when she heard that many of the women wanted to go to Pakistan along with the soldiers in 1974. As Firdous Azim mentions, "On hearing this, she rushed to the rehabilitation centre,

only to discover that for many women that was a more 'honourable' solution than staying in independent Bangladesh". An excerpt from the novel where Mukti is interviewing Mariam elaborates this, as follows:

'If they had not left, would you have gone with them?'

'Perhaps I would have.'

'Did you have any particular plan regarding this?'

Mariam answers Mukti's professional interview question with another, 'Regarding what?'

'Well, regarding going to Pakistan. What would you have done there, where would you have stayed, those kinds of things.'

'If I stayed behind in my country, where would I have lived, what would I have done, were all these questions settled then? Are they worked out even now?'(142).

Let us contrast this with how Bimala had been portrayed in a novel about nation-making- *Home and the World*. Bimala, though compared to the Mother Goddess and the nation itself, was also unable to find herself in the India that is emerging. She is caught between *ghar* and *bahir*, between wearing foreign jackets that she likes or appearing the quintessential Bengali woman for Sandip, and between getting a "modern" education and remaining the traditional bride of a Hindu *zamindar* household. Sandip, Amulya and other swadeshi activists idolize her as *Mataram* while she tries to live up to an image that is beyond human. Nikhilesh's words come to mind yet again, and I must quote the same lines once more:

"The ones who matched with stubborn idealists like us, harmonized with us, and the ones who didn't cheated us. We corrupt the innocent. In creating a partner we destroy the woman"
(Tagore, *Home and the World* 796).

In *Home and the World*, Tagore gives equal importance to the three voices of Nikhilesh, Bimala and Sandip. Both the aggressive or "destructive" nationalist Sandip and the "constructive" nationalist

Nikhilesh (Hogan 24) play their share in altering the woman between them to suit their needs, although Nikhilesh's interests are certainly less selfish. Bimala although uncomfortable at first, gets herself gradually educated, even learning English songs, as Nikhilesh desires. Soon after she meets Sandip however, she seeks to be the symbol of the nation itself, unbending in its traditions. The narrative voices of the two men are certain of themselves, while Bimala keeps shifting between the two, fragmented as she is within her own self. Firdous Azim puts it as follows:

... as Bimala's voice and subjectivity are formed and tossed between the two men, India/Bengal itself seems to be caught between opposing ideologies. Bimala, within the ghar feels confined, and looking out of the house, compares herself to the little river she can see from her window. She knows that the river has a long journey to traverse and that it must finally meet the sea, in which its individual flow will have to merge. She sees the nationalist forces around her as carrying her – the little river – to the sea, and to merge with the forces that are driving the nation to a new destiny and future. Tossed as she is between Nikhilesh and Sandip, Bimala's destiny does not liberate her into a wide world, but further imprisons her into the confines of the zamindari manor house.

The problem with emblemizing the woman is that a woman who falls short of living up to that image or ideal seems to deserve reproach or condemnation. The nation does not want her because she cannot protect the ideals on which it has been founded, so to say. She becomes a traitor to the idea of the new nation which nationalists are struggling to put together. Nayanika Mookherjee talks of the motherhood imagery in the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh in her essay "Gendered embodiments: Mapping the body-politic of the raped woman and the nation in Bangladesh", and questions:

What for instance are the implications of using motherhood as the dominant image through which women are symbolized in the nationalist project for the imagery and subjectivities of

women who are not part of that maternal mould? Does the nationalist project make its public, symbolic space available only to women with certain specific subjectivities? (37)

Mariam definitely did not fit the “maternal mould”. She was a raped woman, thereby considered impure and less chaste- “trash left behind by the army” (282). Moreover, she had already become a “fallen woman” before the war when she was caught watching cinema with her boyfriend at a movie theatre in the village. She had already strayed from the path of customs and tradition. As the narrator says:

It is not just in times of war but in times without conflict, in times of peace, that a woman’s life is thought of as a four-wheeled vehicle, with the body as its driver. If the vehicle veers an inch away from the road paved with customs and rules, then it crashes deep into the rubbish heap. Life has fallen. She becomes a fallen woman. (4)

For the Bengali middle class, aiming for modernity while clinging on to nationalism, it seemed that only as the “respectable, self-sacrificing mother, wife and hence as an idealized woman” is a woman fit to undertake the duty of preserving national culture and identity (Mookherjee 45). It seems as though the woman’s role in the Liberation War is not on the merit of her own active participation, but because of her role as a “patriotic mother” who allows her husband and son to go to war (Mookherjee 45). Here I recall a conversation between Bhavan and Kalyani from *Anandamath*. Bhavan is one of the Children fighting for the freedom of India and Kalyani is the wife of Mahendra, another member of the group of Children. Kalyani had poisoned herself to help her husband perform in his duty towards the nation. An excerpt from the book:

(Bhavan:)¹⁵ ‘A wife is called her husband’s co-religionist. She helps him in the discharge of his duties.’

¹⁵ My parenthesis.

(Kalyani:) 'In small affairs, yes. But in duties of major importance, she is a hindrance. I took poison only to put myself away from the path of his duties. And you, a sinner of a holy man, you villain, why, why did you give me back my life?' (B. Chatterji, *Anandamath* 142)

The role of the mother, wife or sister is still that of the selflessly caring woman at the birth of Bangladesh a century later (*Anandamath* was published in 1882). Mookherjee notes:

Hence, it is only the image of the nurturing and sacrificing woman, as mother, wife or nurse that is authorized by the discourse of Muktiyuddho. From the microcosm of the home to the macrocosm of the nation the presence of the impure woman, epitomized in the figure of the birangona, seems to be excluded. Thus in Muktiyuddho the role of the woman is essentially a designated agency, an agency by invitation only. It makes its appearance not in direct political relation to the liberation but as a mediated, domestic relation to a man. (45)

Bimala as well as Mariam, women at two different times of nation-making, are both always at the risk of crossing that line, falling off that road "paved with customs and rules". Even Tagore cannot resist ridiculing the "modern" Kitty Mitter. For women particularly at a time of nation-building, every move and attire comes to be scrutinized. For Bengali women, wearing sarees, flowers in the hair and teep, and activities like singing Tagore songs and celebrating the Bengali New Year (Mookherjee 44) becomes an indication of your loyalty. *The Search* mentions leaflets being distributed openly in the streets of freshly liberated Bangladesh, by the newly Awakened Youth of Bangladesh, threatening women who reveal too much skin, "wearing blouses with slashed midriiffs and without sleeves as well as wearing sarees below the navel" (Akhter 225). Mookherjee notes:

...they (women)¹⁶ became the icons of Bengali ethnicity, a vehicle for marking cultural (and territorial) boundaries. Women therefore played an important role in forming middle-class nationalist identities in Muktijuddho as they represented all that was simultaneously culturally oppositional to Pakistan and distinctive of Bangladesh. (44)

Mookherjee feels that the concept of 'mother nation' or using "women's bodies as representative icons of nationhood" in the nation-making of Bangladesh was a middle-class construct (38), and one soaked in "middle-class contradictions of morality" (38). The problem essentially lay in putting together the image of the "mother" with women raped during the war, which the middle class tries to resolve in its "aestheticizing¹⁷ sensibilities" (38). She says,

It is this double helix of posturings of modernity of the progressive middle class's resistive politics along with hypocritical value judgements and moral positions that places the raped woman in a place of taboo and transgression. Hence, her necessary appropriation is made possible only within their romantic, literary and domestic paradigms. (38)

In her essay "Women as Activists; Women as Symbols: A Study of the Indian Nationalist Movement", Suruchi Thapar elaborates on the particular concept of "mother" as an emblem for the nation (88). She says how the twentieth century saw the addition of more values to the associated idea of "motherhood", and in addition to being the "nurturer of civilization", it was now also the "defender of civilization" (88). Nationalists constructed and reconstructed the meanings associated with "motherhood" to suit their purposes, which had little to do with the actual position of women in the emerging nation, as Thapar explains:

¹⁶ My parenthesis

¹⁷ The idea of aesthetics, according to Mookherjee, is "the need to bring order out of disorder, mould form from that in which form is absent" (38).

The mother of the nineteenth century was now identified with the 'motherland' or Bharat mata. Literally translated Bharat mata means 'mother India'. This idea aligned the duties and responsibilities of the mother with the duties of a woman towards her nation. Bharat mata was projected as the ultimate mother, with all Indians as her sons and daughters. This mother, when in danger, could summon her 'countless' children to her aid. The idea of Bharat mata served a dual purpose. Firstly, the allegiance of women as mothers to their nation prevented women from expressing displeasure when their sons/fathers/brothers were hauled in to gaols or thrown in kala pani. Secondly, the deified image of a 'single' mother of the whole nation, whose honour had to be protected, aroused the national sentiments of the population as a whole. (88)

Like Thapar, Nayanika Mookherjee notices a shift in the characteristics attributed to the mother image, and observes too how this changes according to current nationalist thoughts. She contrasts the mother ideology presented by Bankim in *Anandamath* to that of the mother nation evoked by nationalists during the 1971 war, commenting that the mother takes a less powerful, more vulnerable form in the latter representation. She puts forth a very interesting point regarding this. She says that since the rape of women (and the nation) occurred before the men while they looked on helplessly, this threatened to emasculate men "through their loss of agency as protectors of the honour of their women, who are conduits for their own honour" which could only be "corrected by then making them saviours in the nationalist project" (44). She says:

Instead of the irresistible power that the mother can command as in Bankim's *Anandamath*, rather than representing her as having an 'avenging power' (Kaviraj, 1994), the mother here needs protection. It was this gendered embodiment of the nature and nation as mother, which I would argue influenced the dominant and valorized construction of the woman in Bangladesh in the nationalist framework. (44)

Talking about the emblemization of women during nation-making becomes a whole new matter in the Liberation War of Bangladesh because of the experience of rape. It is particularly disturbing because her rape experience seems to be perceived as a deliberate transgression from culture, tradition and purity. She gets completely ostracized and there is no scope of rehabilitation even when she is supposedly a national hero, someone whom the state aims to protect by giving her the due respect deserving of a mother. She is converted to an emblem because, as according to Mookherjee, this makes her "image acceptable and hence available to the political instrumentality of the nation through the "aestheticization of rape" (48). She says:

We find that nation-building is enabled through the aestheticized, valourized, respectable and mothered birangona who is permitted to be an image, while the troubled relationship towards her as a raped woman is exempted from this national imagery. Nationalist historiography thus confers freedom by imposing at the same time a whole set of new controls. It defines cultural identity for the nation by excluding the experiences of many from its fold; it grants citizenship to some, while others are consigned to oblivion... (49)

The aesthetization of rape makes us forget the individual women who suffered for countless days and nights at the hands of the Pakistani army. It not only gets easier to accept them, but also easier to forget that they have individual names and personalities and voices. They become "a collective group of nameless raped women" (Mookherjee 49).

This is what I hope this thesis has served to show- how we forget individual women when creating an idea of the woman. As I had begun my thesis by saying, the exact criteria of the "good woman" or the perfect *sahadharmini* may change from time to time, but a guideline always exists by which women must live. For women in this region, nation makers during the two nationalist struggles, one against British colonialism and the other against Pakistan at the birth of Bangladesh, have largely decided what

that guideline must be. More than anything else, tradition becomes a crucial requirement, and any woman who strays from the righteous path so to say is ridiculed and rejected. The traditional woman is the idealized woman, and only she is deserving of respect and adulation, whether it is in 1882 (when *Anandamath* was published), in the early 1900s when Tagore published his novels, or 1971 during the Liberation War of Bangladesh, and even in 2004 when *Talaash* was published. Women in 2004 and even now in 2012 are not necessarily restricted to the *antahpur*, and many women today are very much out in the world and recognized as individuals amidst the mass. Of course it is important to note too that the last novel that I have chosen to discuss is written by a woman and about the sufferings of women. But it strikes me how there are still so many ways in which a woman can displease society and how there are still so many criteria for deciding the "good woman". Her rootedness to tradition is still a powerful testament to her character. Attires are the easiest way of observing this. Women are expected to wear traditional garments like *sharee* and *shalwar kameez* in social gatherings like weddings and funerals although men have completely adopted the Western outfit, while certain clothing items for men like *dhuti* and *uttariya* have been completely forgotten. It is still not okay for women to smoke in public while men can go on dragging casually at their cigarettes.

The figure of the adulated woman has certainly changed over the centuries. For Bankim it was the Victorian ideal of the woman- "feminine", obedient and devoted to her husband, who is pure and chaste enough to be a goddess. Tagore challenges the deification of women, and breaks away from Bankim's idealization. He cannot understand why the nation should emblemize woman and worship her, and why women would worship their husbands. He seeks meaning beyond abstractions and feels we must recognize individuals and not ideas. Where Bankim had paid homage to ideas, Tagore gave voices to people. However, Tagore is still unable to completely move beyond ideals, and even in his perfect woman, tradition is an important criteria. Women can be modern and educated, but she must still be attached to traditions. She must still have long hair, wear "decent" clothes and perhaps not laugh too

loudly, as Sissy does. And then Shaheen Akhtar shows how these conventions still persist, and how thin a rope women balance themselves on in order to not veer off the path of customs and traditions. Because *The Search* is a story of *biranganas*, it deals with physical violence and torture that makes the actual narratives of women incomparable to any other previously discussed in the thesis. However, we get to see how the woman is as uncertain of her place in a nation formed in 1971 as she was in 1916 (when *Ghare Baire* was published) even though she still emblemizes the nation.

But where is the woman beyond emblems, symbols and expectations? Who is Bimala if not Sandip's goddess and Nikhil's devotional wife? Who are Kalyani and Shanti other than perfect companions to their husbands? Did Bimala even like the English songs she was learning to please her husband? What would her political convictions be if not for the influence of the two men in her lives? How would Kitty turn out to be if Amit did not impose his ideals on her? Who are the real women behind these distortions and constructions? If we do not move past these idealizations, perhaps we will never even find out.

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